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VICKSBURG, AND AFTER: BEING THE EXPERI-  
ENCE OF A SOUTHERN MERCHANT AND  
NON-COMBATANT DURING THE SIXTIES

In 1847, I and my three brothers, Bavarians born, having come by steamer from the Old World, landed together upon the wharf at New Orleans. From New Orleans our paths diverged. Being myself an expert watchmaker (our home was on Lake Constance, just across from Switzerland), and fortunately hearing of an opening in Vicksburg, I went thither, and entered the employ of one of the leading watch repairers and jewelers there. I was given six months in which to learn English; but I had learned it so well in four that my employer took a trip to New York and left me in charge of the store. In seven years he died, and I succeeded to the business. To this store came at times, as a customer, Jefferson Davis.

When the war began, my partner and I were selling pianos on a year's credit, we were not losing one per cent of our accounts, and we had \$56,000 on the books! But, with the war, that \$56,000 instantly went all to smash; out of it I collected just \$1,220—a portion in 1866, and the remainder in 1882. Such was the utter ruination brought upon us Southern business men by the lamentable conflict of the Sixties. And yet, it was so slight a circumstance as being generous with a sack of coffee which enabled me partly to recoup.

My partner became a Major in the Confederate Army. There was no business anyway. For reasons which were recognized as sufficient by the conscription officers I was permitted to send into the ranks a substitute.

When New Orleans was taken, and the Mississippi was thus opened to the Federals at its mouth, we in Vicksburg began to apprehend that the long-deferred was likely soon to occur: namely, the siege of the city. One morning the first shell from the Federal gunboats hurtled into our midst. Vicksburg, prior to 1866, when the current finally cut through, was located upon a sharp bend of the river, which formed, as it were, a peninsula

projecting from Louisiana. The Federal gunboats twice a day descended, and stationing themselves upon the opposite side of this peninsula, bombarded us over the trees. They shelled us from six o'clock to eight in the morning, steamed back to other duties, and at four o'clock in the afternoon returned to shell us until eight in the evening.

"Whir-r-r-r-r-r-r!" whistled a shell through the air. Then, "Boom!" it burst; and then, "Whish! whish! whish!" the pieces flew in all directions.

The house of myself and family was at the outskirts of the town, so that we escaped the shells. But the reports of the guns rattled the chandeliers of our lamps. Those persons who could were leaving the city fast. And, at last, we also saw that we must leave our comfortable home. A friend proffered me an old plantation house about ten miles out; and I was exceedingly glad to secure it, because all available shelter for miles around was rapidly being taken up. Next, to move. Every serviceable horse had been pressed into the artillery and cavalry. However, for ten dollars I gained possession of an old, wind-broken animal practically on his way to the tannery, and I picked up a battered two-wheeled cart.

We had become accustomed, in a measure, to the visitations from the gunboats, and between whiles we would walk about fearlessly. From eight in the morning until the afternoon firing hour was a good time for moving, I deemed. But the pesky gunboats began to be irregular. One afternoon they commenced firing before they should, and they caught me. I was hurrying my outfit along as well as one could hurry a wind-broken horse and a battered cart, and the horse was wheezing and the cart was rattling when, to my amazement and consternation, I heard other music joining in—"Whir-r-r-r-r-r-r!"—the familiar sound of a shell, followed by the report of the mortar which sent it! The sound increased, the shell apparently was bound right for me. Not a second I delayed, but abandoning horse and cart and goods, I ran as hard as I could run up the road. "Boom! whish! whish!" the shell had burst. Goodbye, then, to my load, for the horse probably would kick it to pieces. I looked back. The old horse had never noticed. He was jogging on behind me

with ears not even pricked. I went back to him and picked up the lines. A fragment of shell had smashed into the cart and through an oil painting. I decided that I could be as unconcerned as the horse; so we proceeded on together.

To this incident was a curious sequel. In 1882, I was in Cincinnati. While dining at a café the friend who was with me requested: "Tell us some of your Vicksburg experiences."

So I did; and among other matters related about the horse and the cart and the shell. Some men sitting at the adjacent table listened. No sooner had I finished telling this incident, when one of the men jumped to his feet, and excitedly pounding the table, fairly yelled: "I fired that shot! I fired that shot!" He was Captain Hoffman, who had commanded the gunboat battery.

Well, the house into which we moved was very different from our nice Vicksburg home. Formerly it had been a really fine planter's house; but it had long been neglected and had been used as a school. It had been papered upon canvas; the negroes had torn off the paper in order to get at the canvas; consequently the walls were in tatters. In the basement a family of hogs had taken up quarters. The premises were dilapidated and thickly overgrown with blackberry bushes.

Before entering, my wife sank down upon the porch, and cried and cried, moaning: "Oh, have we got to live in a place like this!" Nevertheless, we became attached to the spot, for it was a refuge, and memories eventually clustered about it. When the time arrived to leave it, upon that very porch my wife sank again, and again cried and cried because she must say goodbye.

In this ruinous house on the run-down plantation, I, formerly the prosperous merchant, had four families virtually dependent upon me. A negro and a mule also quartered themselves there. Every night the negro mounted the mule and rode off — where, I never knew. He was the only person who could ride the mule. Time and again pillagers from either army came in, with the inevitable piece of rope; haltered the mule, and straddled him. Up would fly the mule's heels, and off would fly his would-be rider. After vainly trying to do something with him, the soldiers would remove the rope and leave in disgust. Yet he was the meekest looking old mule imaginable, and he never objected

in the slightest to the negro. Eventually he disappeared, and probably was drafted into the artillery.

We lacked much necessary furniture. Upon the plantation was a small graveyard, fenced with weather-beaten and falling palings. From these palings I constructed a couple of bedsteads for the two boys who were members of the household. We were put to strange shifts in those days.

We were just off one of the main roads to Vicksburg; consequently we were exposed to the depredations of everybody, blue or gray, who chanced to be travelling by. We had, in the beginning, three cows; one was stolen; another was killed, and only a steak cut out of her. We had chickens, which speedily learned to roost very high. After the battle of Port Gibson the defeated Confederates streamed past in retreat, bound into Vicksburg. They crowded about our water-barrel, clamorous for a drink. Later, a portion of Grant's army also passed; and they were so weary that it seemed to us we saw whole companies asleep as they trudged and stumbled — many with cheeks resting upon the gunstocks.

The house, as I have said, was open to a visit from whosoever chose. Our hours were not our own. One night I was aroused by the negro whistling the peculiar signal used by the race when something was to be communicated. I stepped out on the porch and asked him what was the matter. "Any Yanks in theah?" he queried. I told him no. "They's some Confederate officers out heah who want to come in, if they's no Yanks about," he explained. The Federal troops had closed in so fast that many Confederates were caught within the lines; and these were some. They were about famished. They said that they were determined to get into Vicksburg; but whether they did I do not know.

Again, we were aroused by the clank of bridle chains, and by orders, in our yard. My wife went out; I followed. The approach to the house was an avenue of trees, great poplars; and we could descry a party of Federal soldiers leading away our horse. This was a thoroughbred horse bought by me from General Taylor of the Confederate Army. The General had used him as his personal mount; but in the battle of Chickasaw Bayou

the horse had been mired, and in pulling free had sprained his foreleg. He was valued at several thousand dollars. "Here!" we called. "What are you men doing?" They began to joke us. "Why, hello, old woman!" they retorted, seeing my wife. "What are you doing up? Where's your nightcap?" "Bring back that horse!" we cried. They good-naturedly explained. They said that they knew they ought not to take such a fine horse, but the orders against stealing had become very strict and yet they wanted some chickens. We had chickens, and if we would give them all they could take, they would return the horse! Certainly, anything rather than to have the horse removed. So they brought back the horse and put him in the stable; and producing sacks, they proceeded to grab the poor chickens from the limbs of the trees, wring their heads off, and stuff the bags. With sacks filled they rode away, engaging to come back again the next night. But they didn't.

We tried to bear patiently with the depredations; but when one night marauders broke into the barn and took every bridle, leaving me none, I revolted. From some carpet yarn and an old bit my wife made me an apology for a bridle; and using this I rode into the Federal camp, sought the officer in command of the District, and complained. He immediately gave me an order upon the quartermaster, which procured me a good, new bridle — but with a big U. S. upon the buttons. However, I put it on my horse and started back for home.

I had gone but a short distance through the Federal camp, when suddenly a soldier sprang up and stopped me. "Well, if here isn't a dashed Johnny Reb going off with a U. S. bridle!" he remarked. And he coolly divested my horse of it! So I rode home with the old rope-yarn contraption after all.

For a time after moving into the plantation house I occupied my spare time at my trade of watchmaker. Some few watches came my way to be repaired. But very soon I found it to be more profitable to "hunt" provisions. With what money I had I rode about the country, buying, when possible, ham and bacon and the like from neighbors. A neighbor and I killed a beef, and "jerked" the meat by drying it in the sun and smoke. It proved very acceptable.

However, in time my family was reduced to a main diet of eggs, milk, cottage cheese and cornbread. For a sack of coffee I paid \$300; part of the coffee (a great luxury) I gave away to a neighbor — an act, the results of which were indeed far-reaching. Finally I was reduced to riding into the Federal camp, and asking for supplies. “Hey! What you coming here for, Johnny Reb?” would tease the soldiers. “For something to eat,” I would reply bravely; and it was the honest, even if humiliating, truth.

I have mentioned that the yard was overrun with blackberry bushes. In lack of anything better to do, my wife busied herself by picking some of the berries, and making blackberry cordial. A Federal soldier happening in upon us, saw the cordial, and immediately besought that my wife put up some for the field hospital. He begged so hard, and said that he would furnish the liquor and the spices and sugar that he won my wife over — particularly as it was for the hospital. The thought of the sick and wounded soldiers, whether wearing the gray or the blue, touched her heart.

In the burning, blistering Southern summer sun she labored, gathering berries and boiling them. The soldier took the cordial, and appeared very grateful. Then, my little girl being ill with a cold, it occurred to me that at the hospital I could buy some quinine for her. So thither I went. To the officer in charge I introduced myself as the man whose wife had been furnishing the blackberry cordial. “The what!” he exclaimed. “Blackberry cordial? Why, I only wish that we had some.” I explained further. I told him about the soldier, and all. “Thunderation!” he ejaculated. “That’s why my patients have been getting drunk!” For the soldier had been the sutler, and not a drop of the cordial had reached the hospital save by an “interior” route! But I secured my quinine, and later the hospital *did* get some cordial.

Vicksburg surrendered. When the troops entered I also rode in, beside, it happened, General Herron of Iowa. Poor old Vicksburg! The bombardment had done its work. I saw my own store a mere heap of ruins, but strange to say, this affected

me not at all; everything was the same. I rode on to the family home. The house had a great hole in the side, where a shell had penetrated. This shell burst in the basement, which had been our dining room, and had splintered the table there so that the remains were about the size of matches.

Before the house I dismounted, and was about to enter, when I encountered a negro whom I had left in charge as caretaker. "I'se mighty glad to see you again, Massa X," said old Joe. "But you better not go in theah. They's Yanks in theah." I pushed past him, and entered. In the hall, upon the sofa, there was sitting a man, well sprawled out, in white trousers and his shirt, and without insignia. He was speaking with another man in uniform — a colonel. The colonel told him that the house was ready, and then passed me and went out. As the man on the sofa appeared to be staying indefinitely, I asked: "By what authority, sir, do you take possession of another man's house?" "That's none of your damned business," he answered, never moving. "Who are you?" "I'm the owner of this house," I said. "Are you a loyal citizen?" he demanded. "That," I replied — for I was furious — "is none of *your* damned business!"

At this he began to swear violently, and started to rise, lifting his foot as if, actually, he was about to kick me out of my own house! I did not wait to be kicked. Instead, I ran down the steps and overtook the colonel. I inquired where I could find General Grant, for I was bound to go to the head of the army. The colonel asked me if I knew to whom I was talking in the hall. I answered: "No, except that I knew it was not a gentleman." The colonel informed me that it was General Mills, Grant's medical adviser, and second only to him in rank, being head of the medical division of the army. But I did not care. I had been treated rudely in my own house, so to General Grant I went. Grant's headquarters were then upon the steamer *Grosbeck*; immediately after the surrender a great flock of Federal steamers had descended from just above the city.

General Grant gave me an order, directing that my house be vacated to me, and upon the back he noted that I would find General Mills another house just as good. General Mills flatly



refused to go; said that he would have to be put out; or at least, he added upon reflection, he would have to be awarded another house equal to this. He had not read the notation. "General Mills," I said, "you *don't* have to go. I don't insist upon your going. I don't want the house yet. But I proposed to show you that I have some rights here. You can stay." This completely changed him. He apologized for his former attitude; thanked me, and told me to make the house my own whenever I was in town. And when, in time, I removed my family from the plantation, I found that the house had been repaired, and that not a thing in it, even to a gold pen which had been left upon the mantel, had been molested.

After the surrender I kept my family still upon the plantation, in the house which had sheltered us. But it was necessary that I should start up business, if possible. Surveying the site of my store, amidst the ruins I saw the safe, lying upon its face. Guards posted about the block prevented me from approaching. As the safe contained things of value, I went to Federal headquarters to ask if I might not raise the safe and open it. General Grant himself (I had now met him several times) received me; and after listening to me, said: "Now, Mr. X, if I were you I wouldn't touch the safe at all. The things in it are much more secure than if in your personal possession. The guard has been posted to prevent depredations, and when you are ready for your safe then you probably can open it." This sounded to me reasonable. I established myself in a small shop, as watch repairer. But one day I noticed that the safe had a hole right through the bottom! Somebody had been into it. The guards offered no objection, now, to my investigating further; and I found that the safe had been emptied!

Well, this was pretty mean. I complained, and was directed to General Logan, who had charge of such a matter. He turned me over to his adjutant. His adjutant promised that the affair should be looked into. Days passed. One morning a man brought into my shop a watch to be repaired, which I instantly recognized as from my lot, left in the safe. He said that he had purchased it from a Federal soldier. Humph! Here was a good clue. I hastened to the adjutant and told him, and the man

described the soldier. And the adjutant claimed that very soon now the whole mystery was to be cleared up. But shortly thereafter came marching orders, and in the confusion my little affair was lost sight of; and so out of my store and my business, all that came to me was one watch.

However, I was not discouraged. At least, I could move my family into town again. I was now without any horse at all; but another mule had quartered himself on the plantation, and I was lucky enough, through a friend, to procure a team-mate for him. With these two mules, and a wagon piled high, I progressed toward town. I had gone but a few miles, when two soldiers sprang out upon me from the roadside. They stopped me, and approaching the mules, blew the hairs apart on their flanks. One mule was branded "C. S." the other "U. S." "Great Scott!" reprimanded the two soldiers. "*This* team won't pull together, Johnny!" Whereupon they detached the mules from the wagon and took them away, leaving me there stalled in the middle of the road. I had to find another team.

Now comes the sequel to the sack of coffee for which I had paid \$300, and which I had divided with a neighbor. I was struggling along with my watch repairing business, doing the best that I could. And doing as well, at any rate, as my associates whom the war had left stranded and destitute, when into my shop walked the man to whom the coffee had been given. "Mr. X," he said, "I have never forgotten how good that coffee you sent over to me tasted; and I have wanted to pay you back in some way. Now, I have some cotton; and if you'll buy it you can have it for one dollar Confederate a pound." He went on to explain that he desired to purchase a plantation which was offered to him for a sum Confederate; and that I could help him make the deal. "But I have no money," I objected. "No, but you have credit. You can borrow," he answered. Which was true. "Come back in an hour," I suggested. Then I went out upon the street, and meeting a young man who I knew had plenty of money at his call, stopped him. "What can I do for you?" he asked. "Have you got any money?" I queried. "Yes. How much do you want?" "I want \$32,000 Confederate."

"Very well." And he promised to have the matter arranged for me within a few minutes.

Cotton, at this time, was worth about thirty-five cents, greenbacks. I engaged to repay the young man, for the loan in Confederate, at the rate of fifteen cents, greenbacks. The cotton owner and I met, and I bought his cotton. In the final payment upon it I experienced what, I believe, was the greatest humiliation of my life.

The city was still under martial law, of course; patrols were posted, and no civilian was permitted to go in or out, save as subject to an examination. Particularly, the carrying of anything in or out was suspicious. While I was on my way back, with my satchel, from the plantation where I had delivered the money, I was halted by a negro soldier. He was a stranger negro; any of the home boys would have recognized me. Suddenly barring my route, he pointed his gun at me and ordered me, with a curse, to get off my horse. I could do nothing but obey. With foul threats he mounted the horse himself, and reviling me and from time to time prodding me with his rifle, he literally drove me before him to the outpost camp. He would pay no attention to my signed pass. It may be difficult for people of to-day to realize, thoroughly, what an indignity this seemed to me—a Southern man, habituated to the Southern darky and to Southern traditions. To be cursed by a negro, to be ordered from a horse and made to walk while he rode; to be threatened by him, even struck by him; to be used worse than I myself had ever used any of his race—for I had been tolerant with all slaves! Well, he drove me to the outpost camp. He delivered me to the officer. The officer recognized me; knew me well. I was promptly released, my horse was returned to me, the soldier was reproved, and I proceeded into the city. To this day I recall that experience with an involuntary shudder.

When I had contracted with the man for the cotton, he informed me that it was not yet baled, but was in the gin. This was a pretty howdye-do, for I had supposed that I was buying it baled. What was I to do? I did not know much about ginning and baling, and help was scarce; and it might appear that I was "up against it." I went to the old negro Joe, who had taken care of

my house during the siege, and who was driving a dray. "Joe," I said, "I've bought some cotton, but it's in the gin-house. Do you know any niggers I can get to gin it and bale it for me?" "I reckon I does, Massa X," he answered. "You jes' leave that to me. I cain't do it myself, but I can find some niggers who *will* do it." So far, so good. About this time an acquaintance came to me and said that he himself had five bales of cotton which needed rebaling, in order to make them marketable; he needed money and must sell them, but he had nothing to rebale them with. I told him to go right to the gin-house where my cotton was, and help himself to baling and twine; and he thanked me.

I shipped my cotton, when baled, down to New Orleans, and followed it so as to be there when it was sold. One day my broker sent me word. "I've sold your cotton," said he, "at fifty-six cents." "Good!" I exclaimed. Now will you advance me \$1,000?" "Certainly," he replied; and gave me the money. I turned it over to my wife, and she spent every cent of it before night, simply in buying necessities, such as clothing for herself and the children. During the war cloth was so high and scarce that she had been obliged to make clothing out of bedspreads and the like.

I felt pretty jubilant over the sale of the cotton; but the very next day, while I was in the broker's office, in came a man with a lot of cotton samples under his arm. "Mr. So-and-so," he said to the broker, "I am sorry to inform you that the lot of cotton you sold us yesterday is not up to sample, and is rejected." "What!" exclaimed the broker and myself together. "I am sorry, gentlemen," repeated the man; but the cotton does not run even with the sample, and there is nothing for us to do but to reject it all." Neither the broker nor I could understand. "The only thing for you, is to have the lot repacked," counseled the man. So here was I, with my cotton thrown back on my hands, and a thousand dollars advance from the broker to repay.

The cotton was spread out on the warehouse floor, and gone over and repacked. What was the matter? Why, that acquaintance to whom I had granted the freedom of the ginhouse and my baling and twine had substituted his five poor bales for five of my best bales! I was angry, and yet it all developed for the

good. During the three weeks consumed in repacking my cotton, prices advanced from the fifty-six cents to seventy-nine cents, and I sold for the top price. On the coffee which I had given my neighbor during the siege of Vicksburg I cleared \$20,000! With the greater portion of my profits, I at once went to New York City, to settle with my creditors. I owed there \$46,000, and offered to pay at the rate of twenty-five cents on the dollar. One man refused to take more than fifteen cents on the dollar. Another man refused to take less than one hundred cents. A third man, after his clerk, a mulatto, had stated that they would have no dealings at all with anybody whose partner had been in the "Rebel" army, interfered, shook hands with me, ordered my note brought, endorsed it, and handed it over with the statement: "Keep it. You're the first person to come up here and settle, and I won't accept a cent."

So much for my own debts. But of the \$56,000 on the store's books, and swallowed by the war, only some \$1,200, as I have said, was ever collected. The last collection was accomplished in quite a curious way. Revisiting Vicksburg in 1882, I was accosted on the street by an old acquaintance, who said: "Why, Mr. G. has been looking for you. He wants to pay you some money, but he has not known your address." I found Mr. G., but we could neither of us recollect how much it was that he owed on that before-the-war account. The books had been burned when the shells had destroyed the store, and my partner, whom I had bought out, was gone. However, I remembered that in 1862 I had placed some accounts in the hands of an attorney across the river in Louisiana; and I thought that possibly he might have the figures of Mr. G.'s account. Mr. G. and I drove over there, and to the attorney's office. He recognized me. I asked him if he recalled anything about the accounting question. For answer he reached out his hand, took from a pigeon-hole a folded, dusty paper. It was the statement for which we were looking! There, for twenty years, it had lain. The attorney certainly showed a remarkable memory — but his collections system was a bit slow.

*Arranged by* EDWIN L. SABIN.

Denver, Colorado.